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AUTHOR Sweeney, John
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ABSTRACT

The development of the advertising writer is really the development of an artist, an artistic process governed by the same exasperating lack of rules. It is above all an internal journey that each student must make to discover his or her own distinctive voice. Frequent assignments will eventually give rise to frequent moments of insight, charm, and drama in students' writing. Several suggestions can help make the creative spark happen in the classroom. First, since the creative process is not a procedure, students must explore their own processes on their own terms. Second, teachers must recognize that the stamp of personality is key; students' ability to put their own personality into their writing is a sign of growth. The focus of the course must be on writing, and the content emphasized must be relevant to copywriting. The class should provide an environment of pleasantness, because risk must be the norm in a creativity class. Finally, although the notion that advertising writing is an artistic process is heretical as far as the agencies are concerned, the job of the advertising writer is not to sell the product but to create a range of approaches to selling the product. These are the values behind the strong writer and the teaching of these values always starts with the demand for individual expression. (HTH)

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"INDIVIDUAL SPARKS"

An approach to teaching the young advertising writer.

John Sweeney
School of Journalism
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill,
North Carolina

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The development of the advertising writer is really the development of an artist. The painter will present the landscape or the still life in a fresh, new way. The novelist will retell the "boy meets girl-boy loses girl-boy gets girl" formula in a yarn that once again holds our interest. The advertising writer will take old, boring claims and use unexpected words and pictures to bring the mundane product story back to life.

It is my opinion, given my artistic orientation, that the training of the writer in advertising is an artistic process governed by the same exasperating lack of rules. It is above all an internal journey that each student must make to discover his or her own distinctive voice.

I ask students to write about themselves in one of my long copy assignments. Most write the usual "I want to get a job, make a lot of money so I can go to the beach in a BMW" confession that I expect and find to be unworthy of despair or irritation after five years of teaching. However, in the midst of the usual, there is the occasional special moment. One student wrote: "I was born on April 21, 1964, somewhere around 3:30 a.m. This was my first indication that I would be a night person."

A moment of distinctive insight and fresh expression leaps before me. Evidence of promise.

Assignments are given to students with endless frequency according to the feedback I get. And moments of insight and charm and drama start to arise with increasing frequency.

One student did a campaign for Crayola crayons. She remembered the strange names for colors that they have and turned these names into a lovely commercial. The viewer sees children's drawings as the announcer asks: Where can a periwinkle dog chase a sky blue bone?

Where can a magenta giraffe eat turquoise apples off of a violet lemon tree?

Where do silver and gold daisies bloom in the winter next to sea green snowmen?

Where can a carnation pink bear fly a copper kite?

In a box of Crayola crayons.

Crayola. Creating ideas in color.

The creative process is a strange one because it is very personal without being particularly autobiographical. Betty Edwards describes it well when she discusses the goal of learning to draw:

> "The object of drawing is not only to show what you are trying to portray, but also to show you. Paradoxically, the more clearly you can perceive and draw what you see in the external world, the more clearly the viewer can see YOU."
>
> -Betty Edwards
> Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain
> page 23

When the individual interprets assignments by sourcing the uniqueness of personality, the creative spark will come. William Bernbach, in a speech on creativity, spoke of the tremendous impact that Rachel Carson's book Silent Spring had in shaping our society's sensitivity to pollution. And he speaks of what he calls the "heart of communication" when he considers

her book.

> "It wasn't so much the facts that Rachel Carson was saying. They were known. It was the LYRICISM with which she related the facts which led to an extraordinary emotional impact, which opened the ears and eyes and hearts of the people, which, in other words, communicated."
>
> -William Bernbach
> "Facts are Not Enough"
> page 6

So how do you deliberately make the creative spark able to happen in the classroom? I will make a series of suggestions.

#1 THE CREATIVE PROCESS IS NOT A PROCEDURE.

I really don't care how students manage to create strong work. My experience has been that there is no correct procedure. No formula. Some students are meticulous and disciplined. Some need the mania of last minute pressure. I am reminded of the story when a reverent questioner asked composer Anton Bruckner: "Master, how, when, where did you think of the divine motif of your Ninth Symphony?" "Well, it was like this," Bruckner replied. "I walked up the Kahlenberg, and when it got hot and I got hungry, I sat down by a little brook and unpacked my Swiss cheese. And just as I open the greasy paper, that darn tune pops into my head!"

Imitate Bruckner, take long baths, play video games, stare at an empty piece of paper--whatever you like to make wonderful work happen but please make it happen by Monday at noon.

I do not mean to denigrate the serious study of the creative process by scientists. It's just that artistic types are not scientists. The attempts at articulation by creative people are often so bizarre that it is easier to just tell the student to go find out how the process works on an individual level. Descriptions, like the following by artist Jasper Johns, show the difficulty of putting the matter into words. Johns said: "It's simple, you just take something and do something to it, and then do something else to it.

Keep doing this and pretty soon you've got something." Good. I'm glad that's clear now.

By sending the student off without procedure, the student is free to search inside. To find a personal way of working. A personal way of seeing and expressing. So, in the final analysis, I have sunny, humorous students whose work reflects a sense of peace with the world and angry, morose students who bring that special flair for the dramatic to the assignments. And, as a teacher, I am always asking these students to explore other places in themselves so their talent spans across a range.

#2 THE STAMP OF PERSONALITY IS KEY.

Listen to the words of WRG Creative Head Charlie Moss on the subject of beginner portfolios:

> "Most beginners imitate the advertising techniques that they have been exposed to all their lives; they don't inject themselves personally into their work. As a result, their books tend to be mechanical and reminiscent of hundreds of others that I've seen before. Once in a while, however, a book will jump out of the pile at me. It sparkles. It sings. It makes me feel good all over. In every case, the thing I'm responding to is the personality of the creator behind the work."
>
> -Maxine Paetro
> <u>How to put your book together and get a job in advertising</u>.

The demand for personality will only accelerate as the student writer becomes the paid professional writer. Harry Jacobs, Creative Head of the Martin agency makes the point with forcefulness: "it's essential that a person take on his own personality if he's to be vitally moving ahead. Otherwise, he's in a box. I think we pay as much attention to whether or not a person is growing as to whether or not he's doing good work."

It is interesting that an excellent study of high achievement gives a confirmation of sorts to the need for personal expression. The study looked for educational patterns in the development of 125 exceptional achievers in activities ranging from music to neurology to swimming.

The study found three distinct phases of learning for the concert pianist and the critical final stage was "making music personal and making personal music." As one music teacher commented:

> "Often after teaching a young person quite a number of years even, and they play very well, you suddenly find a ceiling when they have to do something by THEMSELVES. There's sometimes a lack of imagination, or a lack of intellectual grasp."
>
> -Benjamin Bloom, Editor
> Developing Talent in Young People
> page 420

I believe the analogy can be made to the advertising writer. So one irreverent student writes a public service ad for getting a dog spayed or neutered with the following bizarre beginning:

> "You've heard of all the causes. There are hundreds of them. Save the seals, Save the whales, Save the seals who look like whales, Save the whales who want to be seals. Well, there is one cause you may not have heard of. It's called Save the dog."

Or the student who wrote about a resort island in Mexico using the timeworn uncommercial getaway approach. He wrote:

> "The island of Isla Mujeres doesn't have as much to offer as the typical island resort. Things like traffic jams, long lines and expensive restaurants. And, we might as well admit it, there is only one heated pool: The Gulf of Mexico."

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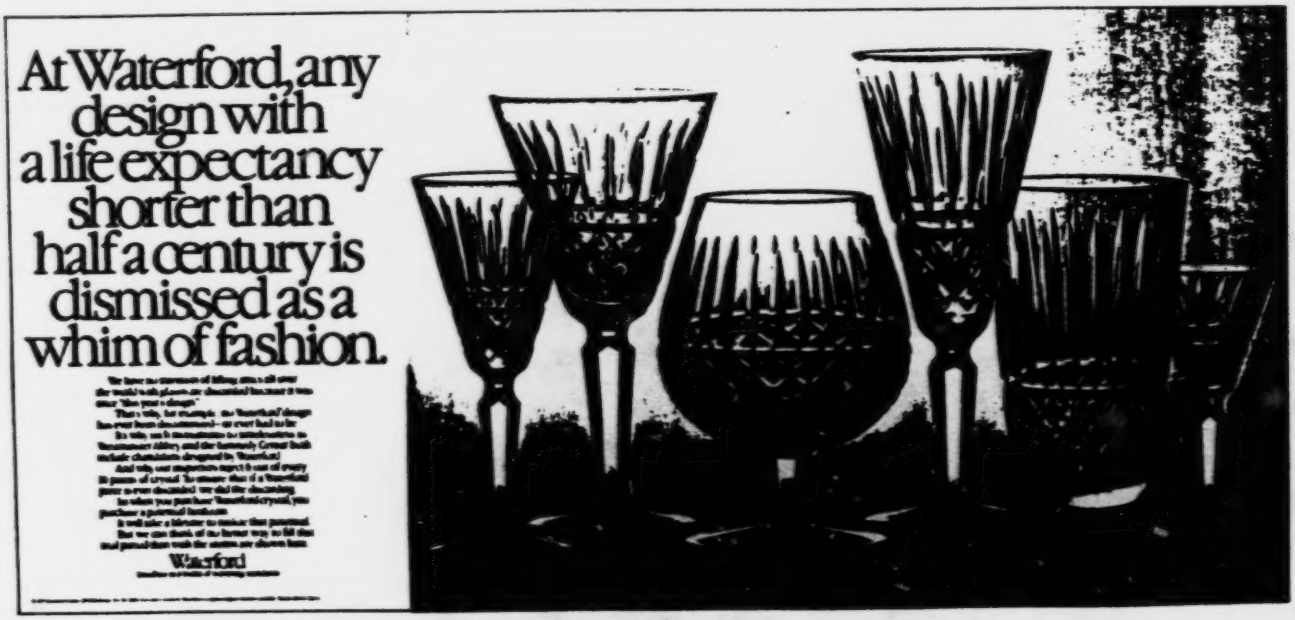
#3 CUT THE CONTENT TO THE BONE.

The glossary of one copywriting textbook had no fewer than 460 terms. It would take every moment of a fourteen week term to master a third of that information and the student would be no closer to being a copywriter. The focus must be on writing. I estimate the average student will develop thirty ads in my introductory copy course. Probably more than thirty in my advanced course. From this barrage of work, knowing will come.

It is most important that the content emphasized is relevant. That is why my assignments are designed to be usable in a copy portfolio. And the approach is geared toward the kind of advertising that creative directors want to see.

The beginner is really confused about advertising. They have seen so many dreadful commercials that it is difficult to know the wheat from the chaff. That is why the class must be introduced to conceptual advertising. Admirable advertising. Award winning work. It is the kind that wins jobs for beginners.

Here are some current print ads I admire:



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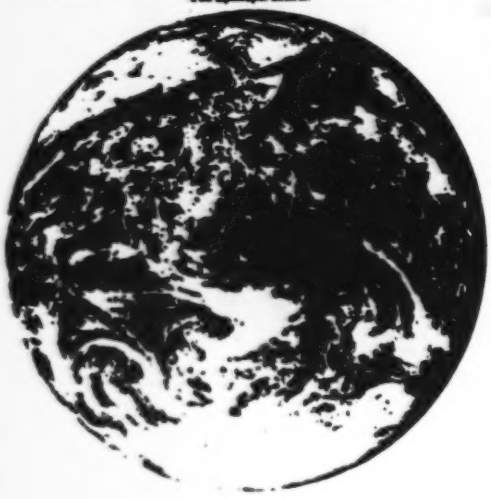
Without God, it's a vicious circle.

In a world we often ruled by war, hunger, disease and inhumanity, The Episcopal Church believes there is hope. Jesus as told more in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.

The Episcopal Church



16 WAYS TO GET THAT SINKING FEELING.

For over forty years, the Bulls Eye® putter has been a winner on Tour. From the beginning, its distinctive shape and soft rubber insert have given it a special balance and feel that has helped many golfers at all levels find what they're looking for: that "one's mine" confidence.

Today, there are 16 classic Bulls Eyes, one for any putting touch. The most popular are available with head finish and shaft flex options.

So get your hands on a Bulls Eye and get the confidence to sink everything in sight.

BULLS EYE by Titleist

Jonathan's Hospital - 12/20/80
Jimi's First Step! - 11/6/81
Allison's Dance Recital 12/27/82
Jimi's First Haircut 9/25/83
Jimi's First Day of School 9/24/84.
Jimi's 4th Birthday 10/17/84
Katie's 7th Birthday 12/4/84
Allison & Katie's Christmas 1984.

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR KIDS TURN OUT ALL RIGHT.

All parents want the best for their children.

And while you do have some control over things like the schools they go to, the friends they meet, even what they watch on television, there are many things that will simply be out of your hands.

There is, however, one aspect of your son's or daughter's childhood that you can control completely. How you choose to record it.

With a Polaroid instant camera, you know when you've got a shot that's come out the way you wanted it. And if it didn't, you've something you don't get with any other kind of camera: a second chance. So you can be absolutely sure that the shots of your son's first steps or your daughter's first birthday party are exactly the way you want to remember them.

Using a Polaroid camera can mean the difference between having photographs you'll look back on and cherish for the rest of your life.

Or having pictures that you'll look back on and regret.

Polaroid

We do what no other kind of camera can do.

Whether you agree or disagree with the work I choose, you are quickly learning what I want. Which will quicken your ability to deliver it on assignments.

#4 AN ENVIRONMENT OF PLEASANTNESS.

One educational study found that pleasant conditions and consequences were consistent factors in learning. The official proclamation:

"A student is more likely to continue learning if instructional conditions are made pleasant."

-Davis,Alexander, Yelon
Learning Systems Design

While I offer no general opinion of the intimidation approach to learning, I don't believe it works in advertising writing. The reason is that risk must be the norm in a creativity class. And intimidated people risk a lot less than people in friendly surroundings.

That is why I find the art of teaching to be the art of reconciling contradictions: 1) The need to be nice yet have demanding standards.

2) The need for positive encouragement and negative feedback.

3) The need for authority yet the admission of subjectivity.

Teaching becomes an art because a pleasant environment must somehow be maintained while still doing all the negative educational tasks that is the difficult duty of the instructor.

#5 AN ADMISSION OF HERESY.

The news that I find advertising writing to be an artistic process does not always sit well with the business attitude of agencies. But I believe it to be true.

The more controversial news is that I don't think it is the job of the advertising writer to sell the product. I believe the advertising writer is an artist whose job it is to create a range of approaches to selling the product. It is the highly-paid job of the Creative Director to select the

the single approach that will move the product off the shelves. No doubt with a little help from account management, research and a herd of clients.

The writer is dedicated to the search for fresh approaches. Always trying to find a communication that is new even if the sales message is old. Always searching for the idea that instantly captures the attention and the imagination of an inattentive audience.

These are the values behind the strong writer and the teaching of these values always starts with the demand for individual expression. The creative spark can only come from within because its source is the personal nature of the writer.